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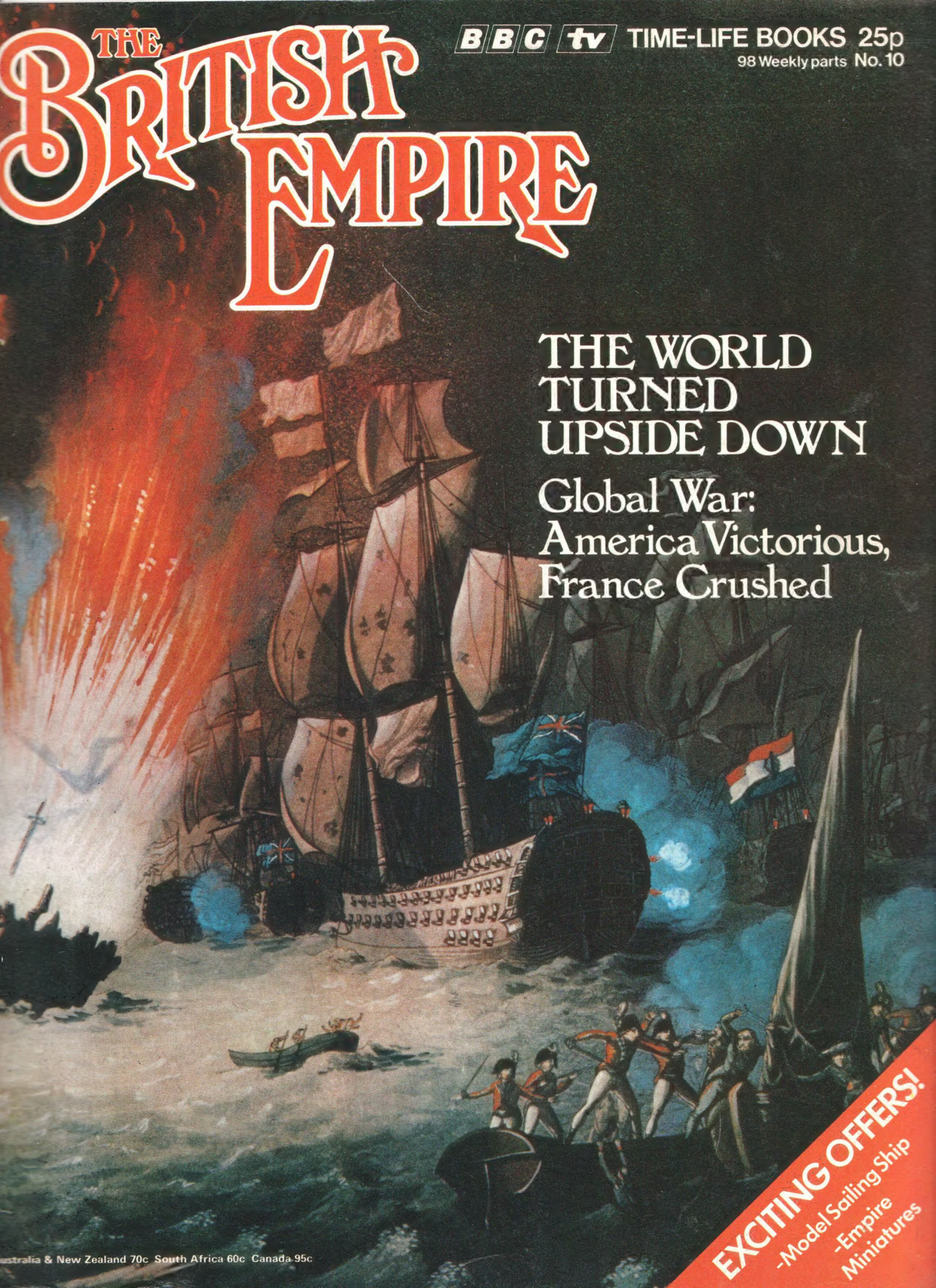
THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Global War: America Victorious, France Crushed



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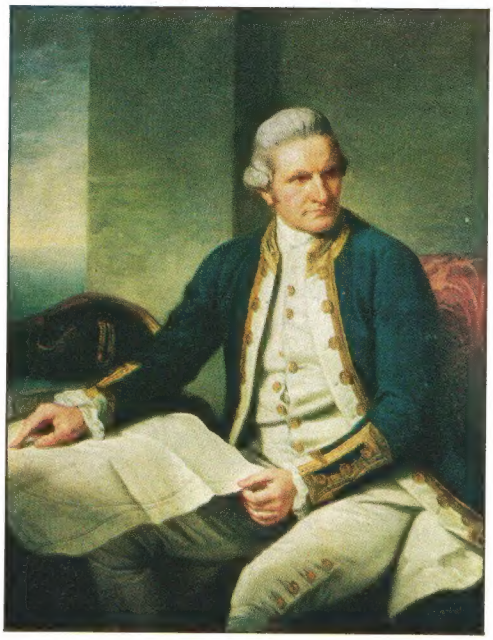

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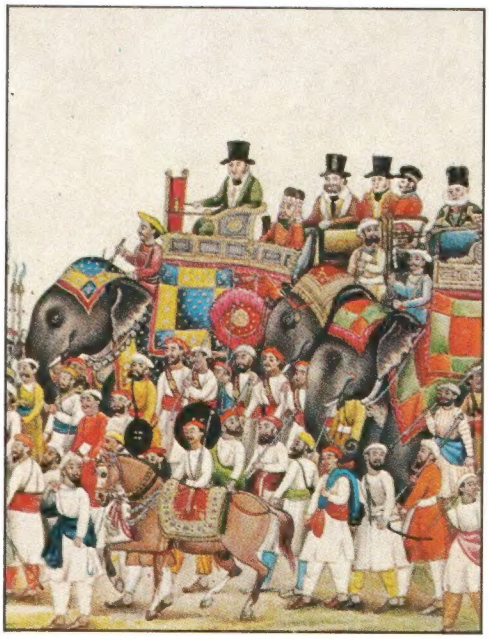

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THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

A French fan depicts angry American colonists maiming the British lion while another Yankee milks a dairy cow representing the riches of British America.

When years of simmering resentment between Britain and her American colonies boiled over into war in 1775, nobody imagined the rebels would last for long. But the ill-trained and poorly equipped farmers and shopkeepers were fighting for their freedom and they waged war with an exemplary tenacity. Britain was shocked by the bitter resistance they offered but amazement turned to horror when France suddenly threw in her lot with the rebels, an alliance that transformed a localized insurrection into a costly and bloody global struggle.

With British troops braced for enemy attacks from Tobago to Trincomalee, not a lot could be done to prevent French troops from rushing to America with vital aid for the rebels and suitably scurrilous fans (above) for the sweethearts they hoped to win. A combined Franco-American force humiliated George III and raised the Stars and Stripes over the New World. But France was to pay dearly for meddling in Britain's affairs.

By Jim Hicks

The news of the fighting in Massachusetts came as a shock to the British. Blood had been shed; it soaked the road from Concord to Boston. But George III was not frightened. "When once these rebels have felt a smart blow," he assured the doubters, "they will submit." He would not allow the Empire to be dismantled by an insolent New England rabble, nor would he let the Opposition in Parliament chip away the British Constitution with proposals for appeasement of the rebels. And to those who argued that Britain's strength was in her commerce, not territories, and that she would gain by freeing the colonies, George sniffed that great events could not be weighed "in the scale of a tradesman behind his counter." Parliament supported him. Britain would fight for America.

One smart blow: that should do it. It was clearly impossible for England's army to conquer all of that vast land; "as wild an idea," said the Adjutant-General, "as ever controverted common sense." Anyway, Britain did not wish to subjugate the colonies, but to bring them home to Empire. At least a third, and perhaps half the Americans were loyal. Smash the rebel army and rebellion would vanish with it.

But, after thirteen years of budget-balancing retrenchment, Britain was ill prepared for war. She had only 7,000 troops in all of North America, and within weeks about 6,000 of them were locked against the sea at Boston by a ring of 16,000 badly organized but determined rebels. In addition, there were the small garrison at Halifax in Nova Scotia and the few hundred men who remained in Quebec after the city had been stripped of most of its troops for the defence of Boston. On paper, the whole British Army numbered 29,000 throughout the Empire, but that included men on sick-leave and establishments in Minorca and Gibraltar. In England and Scotland there were only 9,500 able-bodied soldiers to defend the home island *and* reinforce America.

The Americans had no real navy, and sea warfare was expected to be confined to blockade activity, but the British had not enough ships to do even that properly. There were only two ships of the line and some frigates in colonial waters, and the Admiralty was reluctant to spare any of the 20 battleships which were on guard duty at home, for fear of sudden French and Spanish intervention.

American strength was an unknown quantity. Some estimated that with a population of two and a half million, the colonies might field several hundred thousand men who, fighting on their own ground, might make a formidable enemy. Others maintained there was nothing to fear militarily from the Americans. General Wolfe had called them "the worst soldiers in the universe," while another British general observed that "the native American is a very effeminate thing, very unfit for . . . war."

Still, to beat even a weak enemy one must meet him. Armies had to be raised and transported. With luck, it took a month to cross the Atlantic; without it, three or four months. While the British spent the first year getting ready for a war that had already begun, the Americans were fighting. They made up with initiative what they lacked in organization and discipline. A mere pick-up army of backwoodsmen materialized on the inland lake route to Canada, deftly relieved the surprised British of a string of small forts, and in September, by then 2,000 strong, burst upon Montreal. They destroyed most of Sir Guy Carleton's tiny, 800-man army there and drove him back to the fortress of Quebec. With 1,300 Canadian irregulars he beat down their assault, but then found himself besieged for the long winter.

Earlier, the Boston garrison had suffered 1,054 casualties it could ill afford in dislodging the rebels from a commanding position, Bunker Hill. Sir William Howe was told to move his men to friendlier New York for the winter and prepare for a spring offensive from there, but the ships he needed – which were also bringing food to his army – were blown by gales to the West Indies. When he finally got ships in March, 1776, the hungry, tired British sailed not for New York but Halifax, there to lick their wounds. Thus the war's first birthday found most of the English in far-off Nova Scotia, plus a small band

British army recruiters parade men newly enlisted to fight the Americans. But recruits like these were often such poor specimens that German mercenaries were brought in to support the British forces.

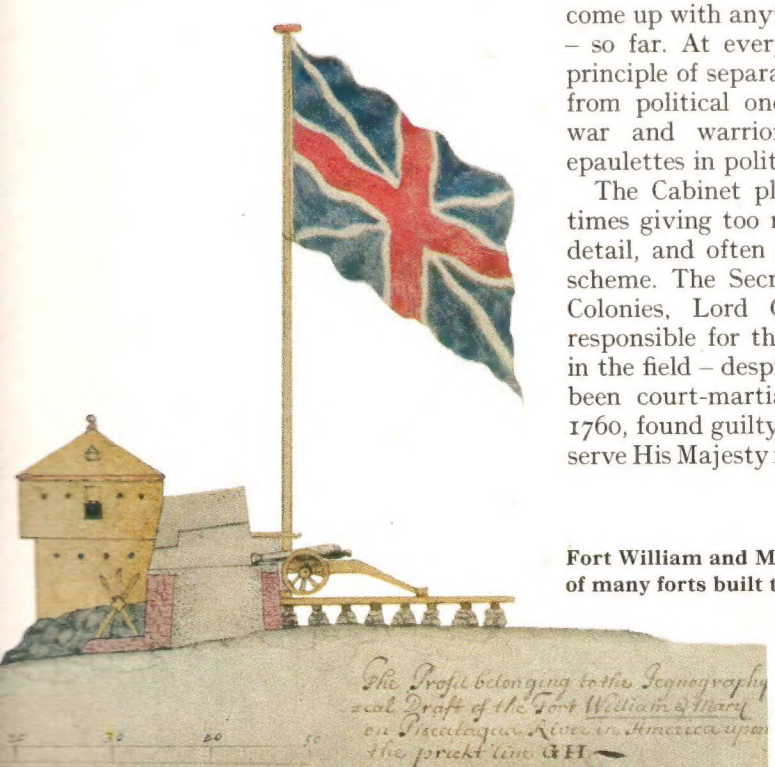
A Navy press-gang hauls away an unfortunate tailor despite the remonstrances of his wife and family. To sail the ships needed to patrol the long American seaboard, the Navy had to snatch all sorts of men, including misfits who had never been near the sea in their lives.

clinging desperately to Quebec; except for a handful of Highlanders in the remote Illinois country, there was no British presence at all in the thirteen rebelling colonies. It is little wonder American plans for a formal declaration of independence went forward.

Meanwhile, with clinks and groans and a gnashing of gears, the great British war machine was grinding into action. Its remarkable inefficiency was offset only by the fact that no competing nation had come up with anything that could beat it – so far. At every level it violated the principle of separating military decisions from political ones. Politicians ran the war and warriors were up to their epaulettes in politics.

The Cabinet planned strategy, sometimes giving too much thought to small detail, and often too little to the grand scheme. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord George Germain, was responsible for the conduct of the army in the field – despite the fact that he had been court-martialled for cowardice in 1760, found guilty and declared "unfit to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatsoever." To put plans into action, Germain had to grope through a maze of boards, commissions, officers and departments that would make any present-day bureaucrat reach, trembling, for his tables of organization. Germain had to find the soldiers (without conscription). Orders had to be issued directly to generals in the field, as the army had no central command. It did not have much of anything. It was transported by the Navy Board, fed by the Treasury (which hired ships for the job), and depended on the Ordnance Board for engineers and artillery. Without these, it was helpless.

To make all these components function together was a mammoth and endless task. As shortages were discovered, convoys misdirected or strategy changed, then ships, men and supplies had to be set upon new courses – not an easy business when it might take six months for a letter to reach America. As clumsy as it was, the apparatus had been made to work, and work well, by William Pitt in the Seven Years' War. Alas for England, she had no Pitt at the helm. The man himself was old, sick and in the outer



Fort William and Mary near Boston was one of many forts built to crush the Americans.

In a British camp in New England, soldiers' laundry dries on tents while guards present arms near the regiment's drums and colours.

darkness of Opposition. The nation lacked leadership.

The Prime Minister, Lord North, certainly failed to provide it. "Upon military matters," he said, "I speak ignorantly and therefore without effect." His colleagues heartily agreed. The Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, treated North with such contempt that when the Prime Minister had a suggestion for naval action, he cautiously had a third party originate it, lest it be rejected out of hand by Sandwich. North talked endlessly of resigning, but the King, who did not know who else he could get without turning to the despised Opposition, told him to "cast off his indecision and bear up" – and to please answer the mail.

The Services had no more leadership than the government. Commissions and promotions depended more on family or political connections than on ability. In 1780 there were 23 generals in the House of Commons. It was the best place for a soldier to do his fighting; if the government failed to shower him with patronage in the form of well-salaried colonelcies, governorships, places for his friends and honours for himself – public praise was the generals' favourite narcotic – he could always sell his vote to the Opposition.

The Cabinet cowered behind collective responsibility. When it was learned, before war with France was declared, that the French Navy had orders to destroy British shipping, most Cabinet members were out of town. Only the King's angry intervention compelled North to order attacks on French ships without first discussing it, as the Prime Minister wished, with the absent ministers by post.

In fact, while George III had much company in his determination to fight, he sometimes seemed to be alone in his determination to win. When the Cabinet dragged its feet, he summoned it to work in his presence. When a fleet was slow to sail, he personally journeyed to Portsmouth to harry the admirals. "If others will not be active," he sighed, "I must drive." But the age when a King could carry a nation to war on his shoulders was over.

The plan for 1776 seemed a good one. New England was the centre of the rebellion. If it could be severed from the rest of the colonies, then harmony and legitimate government could be restored else-

where, with the help of those Loyalists whom the British believed to be so numerous and effective, while the army concentrated on bringing the intransigent New Englanders to heel.

The Hudson Valley and the inland lakes stretched across the back of New England from New York to Canada. When reinforced, mainly by 18,000 hired Germans, Howe from New York and Carleton from Canada would drive towards each other along this line and meet in Upper New York. Besides isolating New England, this strategy would force the Americans to stand and fight. General George Washington, struggling to build a proper army out of his American irregulars, needed time. "We should on all occasions avoid a general action, or put anything to risk," he said, "unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never to be drawn."

The protection of the American line of communication between New England and the Middle Colonies, guarded by the forts along the Hudson, could be that compelling necessity. The British observed that "supplies of meat for Washington's army are on the east side of the river, and the supplies of bread on the west." If the Hudson Valley could be seized, "Washington would be obliged to fight or disband his army for want of provisions." This could be the opportunity for his Majesty's prescribed "smart blow."

British strategists liked to presume that all would go as planned, and allowed the barest possible margins for mishaps. It was a mistake they made persistently, and they began making it early. The two-pronged Hudson offensive had to wait for spring weather. In the meantime, British heads were turned by a scheme for a quick, "inexpensive" operation in the South, where winter was milder and Loyalists more numerous. The reinforcements could be used first for an attack on Charleston, South Carolina, and still get to New York in time for Sir William Howe's campaign in the spring – or so the officials believed.

Delayed by late store-ships, contrary winds and storms, this "winter" expedition did not reach Charleston until June. After a half-hearted and totally unsuccessful attack on strong rebel defences, Sir Henry Clinton (who was made a Knight of the Bath after this failure, "to heal his mind") put back to sea and limped to New York, bringing Sir William Howe his reinforcements in August.

Howe, who had been waiting not only for Clinton's men but for supplies – he refused to fight without proper camp kettles – now began his campaign to take New York, six months after he was to have marched north from that city. The British had been right: Washington would fight to defend this key to the Hudson with his army of 9,500. Howe had the largest force ever seen in America, but moved it as if each of his 25,000 troops was his one and only son. Three times he had Washington's army – and perhaps the end of the rebellion – within his grasp, and three times by caution or indolence let it escape.

Once having trapped the rebel force on Manhattan Island against the East River, Howe actually set his men to besieging American "fortifications" – a ditch only four feet wide, which, opined one of his disgusted subordinates, would not have stopped a fox-hunter. The British were still digging approaches two nights later when the Americans slipped across the river to safety.

In the end Howe did capture a third of the rebel army in Fort Washington, while the other 6,000 Americans scampered "like scared rabbits" across New Jersey and beyond the Delaware River. By then it was November, the end of the fighting season, and his half of the giant pincers which were to have snapped off New England was a long way from its objective. So, as it happened, was Carleton's half.

The Americans besieging Quebec had suffered as difficult a winter as had the British defenders inside the walls. In May, when a squadron of British warships appeared off Quebec to relieve the fortress, the rebels fled. Carleton, with an army at last, set off for Albany to meet Howe – who would not be there. Neither would Carleton. The retreating Americans blocked his passage of Lake Champlain with a fleet of jerry-built gunboats. The British built heavier boats, dragging up the sections from the St. Lawrence, and won the miniature naval battle, but the delay was crucial. Disappointed ministers in London thought he could have pushed on to Fort Ticonderoga, but Carleton backtracked to the north of the lake and tucked his army into sheltered winter quarters. For the British, it appeared that another frustrating year of war was over.

But it was not over, not quite. In a desperate and spectacular movement, Washington's small, ragged, short-rationed army crossed back over the Delaware on Christmas-night and fell with ferocity on the thin defences Howe had staked out in New Jersey. What Germain called "the disagreeable occurrence at Trenton" compared the combatants in a way which should have

IN PROVINCIAL CONGRESS,

NEW-YORK, JUNE 13, 1776.

WHEREAS this Congreſs have been informed by the Continental Congreſs, and have great Reaſon to believe that an Invaſion of this Colony will very ſhortly be made.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY, That it be, and it is hereby recommended to all the Officers in the Militia in this Colony, forthwith to review the ſame, and give Orders that they prepare themſelves, and be ready to march whenever they may be called upon.

ORDERED, That the aforegoing Reſolution be publiſhed in the public News-Papers, and printed in Hand-Bills to be diſtributed.

Extract from the Minutes,

ROBERT BENSON, Sec'ry.

A handbill warns militia to prepare for General Howe's threatened attack on New York.

shocked Great Britain: the Americans seized badly needed supplies and killed or captured 1,300 troops while losing only two of their own – who were not shot, but froze to death.

Another year, another distraction. In 1777 it was Philadelphia, seat of the Continental Congress and hive of Loyalists, that lured the British and diverted them from their purpose in the Hudson Valley; by some reckonings this cost them the war. Philadelphia pulled Howe like a magnet. It could be taken, he told London, by his main force while he sent 10,000 men up the Hudson to fulfil the original strategy, which was still considered valid, although in revised form.

General John Burgoyne, who had politicked during the winter to wrest from Carleton command of the 1777 expedition, had proposed that the British advance from Canada on two fronts – the main army moving down Lake Champlain and the Hudson while an auxiliary force marched eastward from Oswego along the Mohawk Valley. The two wings would converge on Albany from north and west and there meet Sir William Howe's men coming from the south.

London approved both Burgoyne's and Howe's plans, which at that point were not necessarily incompatible. But then Howe changed his mind; he would send only 3,000 men to meet the army from Canada. Finally, he decided to send none at all, but to hold a force ready to "assist" Burgoyne if he needed help. Thus the basic strategy was discarded and British force perilously dispersed. If Germain in London wished to object to Howe's latest plan, it was too late; operations had begun.

Burgoyne was already marching into the rebel thickets of Upper New York when he discovered that no one was coming to meet him from the south. His army of 7,000 took Ticonderoga and pressed on to Fort Edward, where it had to wait 30 days for fresh supplies from Canada. Meanwhile, Patriots led by Benedict Arnold routed the auxiliary British force from its siege of Fort Stanwix on the Mohawk and pushed it back to Oswego. Burgoyne's western flank was now exposed, and rebel militia swarmed like bees about him, growing ever bolder and ever more numerous day by day.

If Burgoyne crossed the Hudson and moved towards Albany, the Americans might cut off his line of retreat. If he withdrew, he later asked Parliament, what would England have thought of him? He was vain, and he was a habitual gambler. He went forward. The Americans leaped on his line of communications and mauled his army when he tried a last frantic breakthrough to Albany. On October 13, near Saratoga, surrounded, outnumbered and with no hope of rescue, he surrendered.

The blow struck at Saratoga shook the Empire's foundations and opened cracks in the wall for all to see. The jubilation of the Opposition in Parliament bordered on treason. North tried to resign and Howe, Burgoyne, Carleton and Germain plunged into a public orgy of mutual recrimination. France, which had been supporting the rebels secretly, saw at Saratoga the clear indication of Britain's weakness. This was the signal for which Paris had been waiting. The absolute Bourbon monarchy signed a treaty with the anti-monarchical Americans in February, 1778; France prepared to strike a decisive blow at her old rival.

And Philadelphia? Howe took it, but it was militarily worthless, and the army abandoned the city nine months later, leaving the Loyalists there to the ravages of both the vengeful rebels and an epidemic of venereal disease graciously donated by the departing troops.

After Saratoga transformed civil war to world war, America's importance to British aims and strategy waned before the infinitely greater interests of capturing the West Indies, by value of products the richest region on earth. "Let the dance of rebellion go round," a supporter urged Germain, "while we appropriate the islands." Even the King said he would come to terms with America if he could be sure of conquering the French islands, a victory that would ruin French finances and repay Britain's cost of the war. An attempt to settle with the Americans failed, but the Cabinet decided to reduce the military effort in the colonies to a holding operation. This was now a sea war.

Britain was little better prepared for a naval conflict than she had been for one on land. She had 41 ships of the line in service, to France's 33, but as an island nation she had to keep 30 of these warships in home waters to fend off invasion and escort merchant convoys. The French ships were free to strike anywhere. Fearing that Spain's Navy might also be thrown against her, Britain raced to make up for lost time. Soon ships were being built on "every slip in England" and all commercial shipping was temporarily stopped – even the market boats ended their plying between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight – while the Navy's dreaded press-gangs snatched from the streets the seamen needed to man the new fleet.

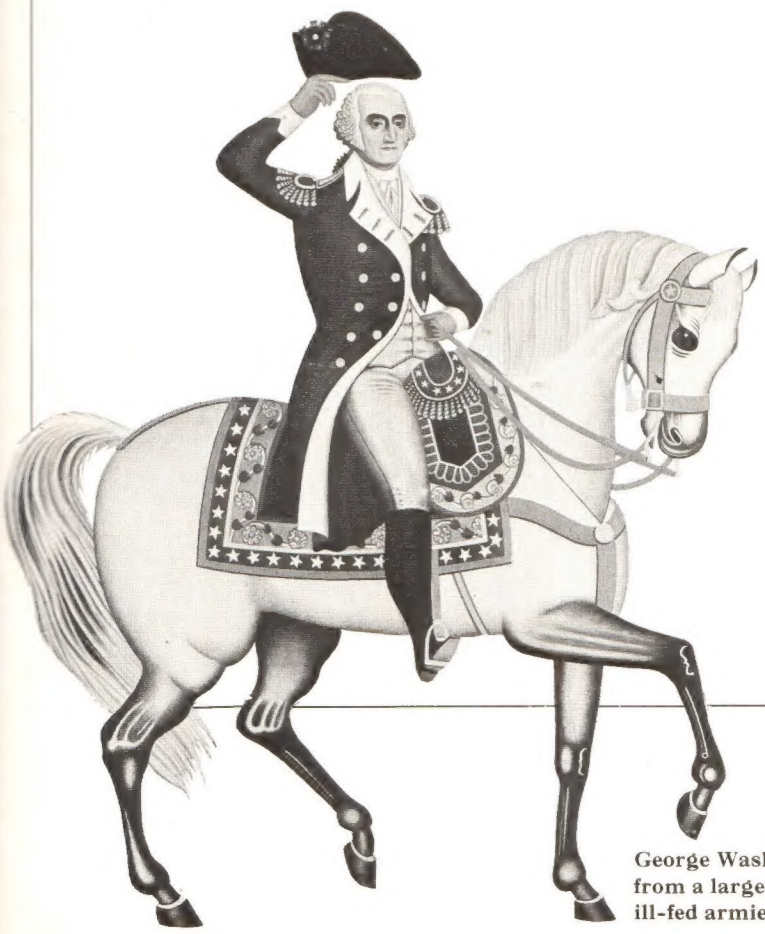
But the Navy needed more than ships and sailors; it needed bold men to command them. Too many admirals, like Augustus Keppel, set sail by political winds. Keppel's politics were Opposition, so when he was given command of the nation's main fleet he suspected he was being set up as the sacrificial lamb for the Admiralty's inadequacies, a suspicion that accentuated his natural timidity. After much hesitation, he was finally induced to put to sea with 20 ships in June, 1778, but he scurried back to port after two weeks when he learned that 27 French vessels were waiting. He set the terms under which he would sail: a force equal to the French, "ship for ship in the line."

When Keppel finally met the French off Ushant a month later he had the edge, both in ships and firepower, but after an indecisive skirmish the French escaped. The real fighting took place later in England when Keppel and Sir Hugh Palliser, one of his division commanders, blamed each other for the débâcle – firing opening salvoes in the Press and closing for action in courts martial and Parliament. The row split the nation and the Navy. The two men's flagships had to be docked separately for fear their crews would kill each other. When Keppel finally won his case in 1779, ecstatic mobs led by Opposition M.P.s smashed windows in the London houses of Palliser, Germain, and the Prime Minister. While half England celebrated this great "victory," the French fleet, which remained intact, still menaced the Channel, where they would soon be joined by yet another enemy: the ships of the Spanish Navy.

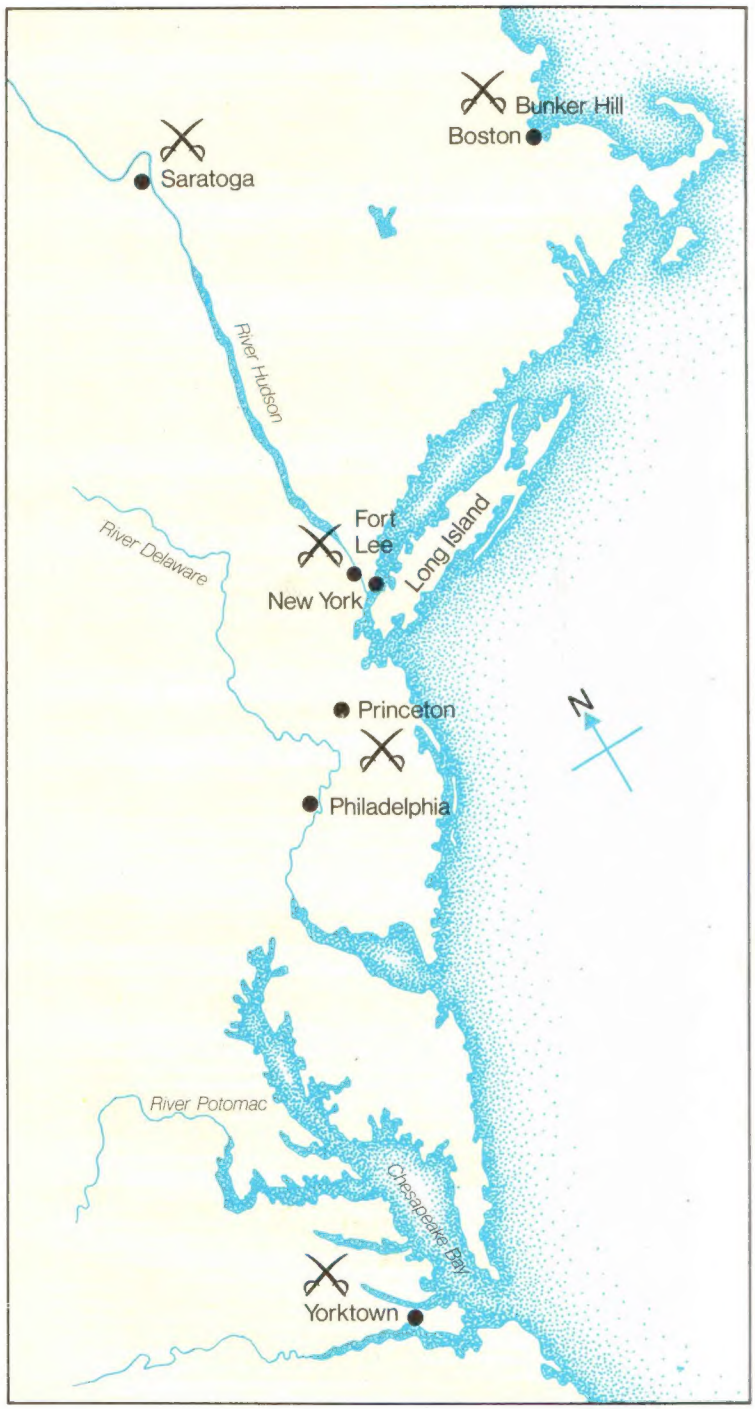
AMERICA BREAKS AWAY

It was perhaps inevitable that Britain would lose her American colonies. But any hopes that the parting would be amicable were dashed when George III's bumbling ministers levied punitive taxes on the proud, touchy and self-reliant Americans. These measures drove the colonists to open, armed rebellion in 1775.

Britain's High Command proved a suitable match neither for the tenacious, dogged American Commander-in-Chief, George Washington, who struck, as at Princeton, when least expected, nor for the swashbuckling officer, John Paul Jones who preyed so destructively on British shipping. The war became increasingly burdensome for Britain when France sided with the rebels after their victory at Saratoga. After frustrating years of inconclusive fighting round the Eastern Seaboard (right) the British army was trapped at Yorktown and the war was lost.



George Washington, seen here in a detail from a larger painting, led his ragged and ill-fed armies to victory over Britain.



This map locates the most significant battles of the American Revolution, from the bloody but indecisive clash at Bunker Hill to final rebel victory at Yorktown.

Soon after British troops made their triumphal entry in to New York (above), a mysterious fire damaged the city. "Providence, or some good honest fellow, has done more for us than we were disposed to do for ourselves," Washington gleefully observed.

The Tide Turns

It was one thing to declare war on Britain. It was quite another to win it, for George III was determined to teach Washington's ragtag army a lesson. In August, 1776, General William Howe landed 32,000 British troops on Long Island, threw the American Army into headlong flight and took New York. One bold decisive stroke would have cut the retreating rebels to ribbons. But Howe, whose hesitancy always flawed his martial qualities, let Washington slip through his hands.

New York gave Howe control of the Hudson. Now he set about reducing the American forts on the river. In a raid on Fort Lee across from Manhattan, British troops scaled a precipitous cliff and seized vast quantities of guns and ammunition. Washington's broken army, plagued by desertion and expiring enlistments, retreated south through New Jersey; while Howe retired to winter quarters.

As the snow fell, Washington planned a brilliant counterstroke. Slipping across the Delaware, he staged successful attacks at Trenton and Princeton, marvellously renewing flagging rebel spirits.

British troops rowed up the Hudson in a flotilla of longboats to attack Fort Lee. But after toiling up the steep cliffs they found the garrison had fled, leaving all its equipment behind.

The Battle of Princeton was painted by the son of the American General William Mercer, killed in that action. As the British fled the field, George Washington cried: "It's a fine fox chase, my boys!"

The Earl of Selkirk's rambling brick mansion in Kirkcudbright Bay echoed to running feet and frightened screams when John Paul Jones's ferocious band burst in to kidnap the peer.

John Paul Jones, heroic symbol of America's Revolutionary navy, later became a Rear-Admiral in the Russian Navy and fought against the Turks.

John Paul Jones's *Bonhomme Richard* and *Alliance* bludgeon H.M.S. *Serapis* into submission, while crewmen battle in boats. When the *Bonhomme Richard* sank, Jones sailed home in his English prize.

"I Have Not Yet Begun To Fight!"

A primitive Stars and Stripes, adopted as America's flag in 1777, fluttered from all the ships under Jones's command.

Britain had little to fear from the embryonic American Navy, but one officer, John Paul Jones, proved as daring as any privateer and gave Britain constant trouble. Jones was a Scottish gardener's son who, with ice-cool nerve, horrified George III by bringing the war into Britain's backyard. From his base in France, which was allied with the rebels since Britain's humbling defeat at Saratoga in 1777, Jones sailed the *Ranger* into the Irish Sea and took a number of prizes. Then on April 23, 1778, he swooped on Whitehaven in Cumberland and spiked the town's guns. That same day he raided the Earl of Selkirk's house off the Solway Firth and, failing to find the Earl at home, walked off with his silver plate.

In August, 1779, Jones again went raiding, this time with two ships: the *Bonhomme Richard*, a leaky old 42–gun French East Indiaman, and the frigate *Alliance*. The little squadron stumbled on a British convoy, whose escort included the heavily armed *Serapis*, off Flamborough Head in Yorkshire. In a grim and bloody action, Jones brought the *Bonhomme Richard* alongside the *Serapis* and for over three hours the two ships tore at each other with crashing broadsides.

As guns began to explode aboard the *Bonhomme Richard*, the Captain of the *Serapis* called on Jones to surrender. "I have not yet begun to fight," roared back the doughty American. When Jones's guns smashed the *Serapis*'s mainmast, her Captain had no choice but to strike his colours. Jones boarded her, hauled the Stars and Stripes to her masthead and with the customary civility of 18th-Century warfare took the defeated Captain to his own ship for a glass of wine. "The American ship was dominated by a commanding will of a most unalterable resolution," wrote the captain in a disconsolate report he later submitted.

An Incredible Defeat

As Britain struggled into the sixth year of war with America, General Cornwallis made a fatal mistake. To secure a port for supplies and communications, he fell back on Yorktown in Virginia. But before the Royal Navy could arrive to relieve the town from the sea, the French fleet under Admiral de Grasse arrived, forced an English fleet to retire and firmly blockaded the British.

Cornwallis could only watch helplessly as the French Admiral ferried in a 16,000-men Franco-American force to lay siege to the town. Outnumbered two to one, Cornwallis abandoned his outer defences, and Washington moved in close enough to pound the centre of the town with his heavy guns.

After five days of ceaseless bombardment and the loss of two key redoubts, Cornwallis asked for surrender terms.

Two days later Yorktown capitulated and 8,000 men with their muskets, cannon and horses marched into captivity as their bands appropriately played *The World Turned Upside Down*. For Britain the war was as good as over. Humbled by one of the most appalling military disasters in her history, she concluded a peace treaty with America in 1783.

Cornwallis (below) could not bring himself to attend the surrender at Yorktown (right). The sight of the French fleet which had throttled him into submission was more than he could bear.

Cornwallis's defeated men march from Yorktown through long ranks of American and French troops. The victors were quiet, the vanquished retained their dignity.

II The Frightful Strain of Global War

Spain had her own American Empire and no interest in aiding a colonial rebellion, but came into the war in June in hopes of getting Gibraltar and Minorca from Britain. Her fleet gave England's enemies an overwhelming superiority in numbers, although this was offset somewhat by the Spaniards' less than consummate skill as sailors. "Their ships all sail so badly," groaned a French commodore attached to their fleet, "that they can neither overtake an enemy nor escape from one."

The English also had the 18th-Century equivalent of a secret weapon. In a timely technological breakthrough, they had learned how to sheathe their ships' hulls in copper, which protected them from the fouling by seaweed that slowed down a wooden ship after a few months in the water. "Twenty-five sail of the line, coppered," said an English officer, "will be sufficient to hazard and tease this armada, so as to prevent their effecting anything."

When the combined enemy fleets, 66 ships, appeared off England's south coast in 1779, they achieved little more than a royal proclamation ordering the cows to be driven inland to safer counties. But the need to defend home waters severely hamstrung other British efforts. Instead of sweeping up the French islands in the West Indies, Britain was fighting a see-saw battle in the Caribbean to keep control of the sea. Dominica, St. Vincent, and Granada fell to the French in 1778 and 1779. Admiral Samuel Barrington took St. Lucia and held it against a French fleet twice as large as his own – for which he received, he felt, inadequate praise. To show his pique, he refused to accept another command.

The Rock of Gibraltar hung like a millstone round the neck of the struggling Empire. Blockaded by the Spanish, it had to be relieved three times by ships badly needed elsewhere. "We must stretch every nerve," said the King, and stretch they did. The British invaded Spanish Nicaragua and even had plans for an expedition to challenge Spain in the South Pacific when a more urgent crisis, closer to home demanded their attention.

Holland had refused to stop supplying naval stores to France and Spain. At a crucial Cabinet meeting – during which Lord North and another Minister fell asleep immediately and a third dozed off slowly, dropping his hat to the floor – it was decided to confront the Dutch with an ultimatum. Holland refused the demands and in December, 1780, went to war, adding another 20 battleships to the navies opposing Britain.

A new front was opened in a war that already had more than the British could handle. The Dutch held the Cape of Good Hope and Trincomalee in Ceylon, both vital to control of the Indian Ocean. At the same time that war began with Holland, Haidar Ali, the Sultan of Mysore, sent a large, well-disciplined army against British posts in the Carnatic on India's east coast. The Eastern Empire, only recently established, was in peril.

Initiative had passed to the enemy. The expedition against Spain's South Sea settlements was cancelled and the force intended for it made for South Africa and the Indian Ocean. But the French reached the Cape first, secured it, and sent a fleet to help Haidar Ali. So the British had to detach yet other precious ships to Indian waters, where they would be kept busy for the remainder of the war.

In November, 1781, British forces seized the Dutch base of Negapatam, the

Napoleon as a fighting cock (left) leans across the Channel and threatens a cockerel representing the Prime Minister, William Pitt. But it was only an empty threat. The invasion force – shown so confidently on the face of this French watch (right) – never left the safety of Boulogne Harbour.

"Am I thus protected?" asks an incredulous Britannia as she discovers the Prime Minister, Lord North, asleep. The cartoon, published after the humiliating British surrender at Yorktown in 1781, reflects the contempt in which Lord North had come to be held by most Britons.

only natural harbour on the south-east coast of India, and two months later captured Trincomalee. The success was short-lived. Bailli de Suffren, a brilliant and uncharacteristically aggressive French admiral, arrived with enough ships to give the French naval superiority. With Haidar Ali's help the French took Britain's mainland port of Cuddalore, and in July, 1782 retook Trincomalee.

The nerve had been stretched too thin. Instead of picking off her enemies' colonies, Britain was losing her own. In 1781, the Spanish stormed Pensacola, winning West Florida, and the French took Tobago. The next year three more of Britain's West Indies fell: St. Kitts, Montserrat and Nevis. In Europe, Minorca – its garrison reduced by scurvy to some 800 effectives – finally surrendered to 14,000 Spaniards and Frenchmen.

These diversions had taken the British a long way from America, where the war began – and was still going on. Despite the decision to halt offensives in the colonies, the army had another go at the South in 1778 and conquered Georgia, finding at last the strong Loyalist support they had been seeking. Encouraged, they moved against Charleston in 1780 once again and this time they won it, with a bag of 7,000 rebels. From there General Charles Cornwallis and 4,000 British troops marched northerly in 1781.

The farther he went, the more fierce and resilient was resistance. For every band of militia he beat, another sprang up like mushrooms in the woods. He lost his lifeline back to Charleston and groped for the sea. At the James River in Virginia he connected with a force sent from New York to help. Under intense rebel pressure, he had to take a defensive position. He chose Yorktown.

Cornwallis was "a good officer, devoted to the service of his country, beloved by the army." The plan, not the man, fixed his army's fate. Now the British force was divided in America – 6,000 men at Yorktown and 11,000 at New York – a tenable arrangement if the British Navy controlled the sea between, fatal if it did not. Where was the British Navy?

Admiral Thomas Graves's squadron was cruising off Boston to intercept French supplies. In the West Indies, a larger fleet had captured a rich Dutch island, St. Eustatius, and while Admiral George Rodney was counting his £3,000,000 booty, a French fleet led by Comte de Grasse slipped in from Europe, took Tobago, and then set sail for the embattled colonies to the north. Rodney showed up as the French departed, but he said he "was not such a Don Quixote" as to attack 23 ships with his 20. Besides, he was not feeling well. He sent most of his fleet to follow de Grasse northward, but he followed his prize-money to England.

At home, the Channel fleet was once again bending every effort to relieve Gibraltar, which was why de Grasse had been able to leave Europe unmolested. To let the French sail off to America was a conscious choice of a Ministry with too many alternatives. Some of the Gibraltar ships would be sent to America on their return, but it would be too late. Britain had overstretched herself.

And George Washington knew it. "I have never seen a man moved by greater or more sincere joy," said a Frenchman who accompanied the American Army as it dashed south to Yorktown, covering 200 miles in 15 days. Washington had cause for joy; de Grasse had promised to use his ships to trap Cornwallis.

When Graves met the British ships from the West Indies in New York, the penny dropped at last. They hurried south to the Chesapeake and found de Grasse already there, his cruisers blocking Cornwallis's escape by sea. On September 5, 24 French ships came out to fight the 19 British vessels. They fought

one day, watched each other for four, and then the French reclaimed their position as the anvil on which Cornwallis was being hammered. It was an unspectacular battle, but decisive. George III knew it. When told the news, he said, "I nearly think this Empire ruined."

Facing an army of 16,000, backed against waters controlled by a hostile fleet, Cornwallis surrendered. On October 18, 1781, British soldiers walked through a mile-long corridor of Americans and Frenchmen to lay down their arms, behaving, a witness said, "like boys who had been whipped at school. Some bit their lips; some pouted; others cried." Tradition – which has been known to add irony of its own when history fails to provide enough – says that a British band played *The World Turned Upside Down*. When he heard the news in London, Lord North staggered as if struck by a musket-ball. "Oh God," he murmured. "It is all over."

His ministry fell and a new one quested after peace, which was more palatable than expected because of two last-minute victories. Another relief had saved Gibraltar from a tightening Spanish grip and an enemy fleet aimed at Jamaica was defeated by Rodney, now back in the West Indies. That helped to salvage the Empire, but Rodney's failure to pursue the fleeing French and Spanish says something about why it needed salvaging. When a junior officer complained they might easily have captured 20 ships instead of five, Rodney demurred: "Come, we have done very handsomely as it is."

In the Peace of 1783, Britain returned St. Lucia to the French and Trincomalee to the Dutch, agreed to Spain keeping Minorca and Florida, and acknowledged, of course, America's hard-won independence. But Britain successfully rejected rebel claims to Canada, recovered all her own West Indies except Tobago, held Gibraltar, saw to it that the French left the Cape of Good Hope, and won the right to trade in the Dutch East Indies.

Considering the way the war had gone, it was not a bad settlement, but Britain had lost something which was not written into the treaties – the respect that other nations had accorded her strength. She had fallen, said the Emperor of Austria, "to the rank of a second-rate Power," and would remain there "forever." If he was right about Britain's new position, he was wrong about how long she would be confined to it.

When the House of Commons was told, in December, 1783, that William Pitt the Younger had been named Prime Minister, the members burst into laughter. The Press joined in:

A sight to make surrounding nations stare;
A kingdom trusted to a schoolboy's care.

Pitt was 24 years old.

Despite his youth and some personal faults, he became a great Prime Minister. He drank heavily. His debts at one point compelled him to assign his salary to the banker Thomas Coutts. But he showed a better brain for national finance than any other man in England, and he was scrupulously honest in an era of rampant, casual corruption. Most important of all, he knew precisely what would make Britain great and powerful again: trade.

Europe's diplomatic intrigues were of little interest to him except when they affected Britain's commerce. He preferred to form "an alliance with that more formidable of all Powers, the power of surplus." Knowing trade had to be protected, he made the Navy an exception to his public economies, building 33 new ships of the line during his first seven years in office.

His revival of Britain was miraculous. Within seven years of her defeat, the "second-rate Power" twice met her old enemies toe-to-toe and twice made them back down. Both of these confrontations involved issues vital to the future of the new Empire Britain was developing in the East to replace the old one which she had lost in America.

In 1787, France supported Dutch republicans who wanted to overthrow the pro-British Prince of Orange. Pitt was alarmed that the Cape of Good Hope and Trincomalee, Dutch holdings that lay athwart his trade-routes to the East, might fall into French hands. In September, Prussian soldiers moved into Holland to bolster the Prince's régime, and France seemed ready to send in her troops to counter this intervention. Pitt was blunt. If France wanted influence in Holland she would have to "fight for it." His Cabinet approved plans to hire

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William Pitt (standing) only 24, addresses the Commons after becoming Britain's youngest Prime Minister in 1783. An aloof man of great probity, he restored Britain's confidence after its wounding defeat by the American colonists through policies that brought peace and prosperity. But his liberal and enlightened plans were destroyed when war broke out with Napoleon.

America is lost! Must we fall beneath the blow? Or have we
resources that may repair the mischiefs? What are those resources?

George III's hand spells out the acute dismay he felt at the loss of the American colonies.

GIBRALTAR'S GREATEST ORDEAL

The British capture of Gibraltar in 1704 was a humiliation the Spanish could not endure, and their bitterness was only heightened by the two abortive attempts they made to recapture the Rock. Then in June, 1779, while Britain was absorbed in the struggle with her American colonies, Spain again declared war. Her goal, as always, was to recapture the towering natural fortress that held the key to the Mediterranean.

Gibraltar's longest siege reached its climax in September, 1782, after Spain had hammered vainly at the citadel for three years. During that time two British convoys had run the blockade to resupply the beleaguered defenders. And on one occasion the Rock's indomitable Governor, General Sir George Eliott, led a brilliantly successful sortie beyond his lines to spike Spanish guns.

Thoroughly exasperated by their lack of success, the Spanish and their French allies hit upon the novel idea of building ark-like floating gun-batteries with massive timber roofs and walls. On the night of September 13, ten of these craft entered Algeciras Bay and began to bombard the Rock; British cannon-balls glanced harmlessly off their wooden armour.

To meet the threat, Eliott ordered his artillerymen to heat their shot until it glowed red-hot. When these heated missiles struck home, two of the floating batteries burst into flames almost immediately. This was the signal for Captain Curtis, commanding the Rock's twelve gunboats, to attack. Dawn revealed a picture of utter devastation. Curtis saw "numbers of men crying from amidst the flames, some upon pieces of wood in the water . . . all expressing by speech or gesture the deepest distress, and all imploring assistance." He was moved to pity: "We felt it as much a duty to make every effort to relieve our enemies from so shocking a situation, as an hour before we did in conquering them."

The Spanish withdrew and two weeks later a fleet of transports arrived to save the British from the one remaining threat – starvation. The long siege finally ended when peace was signed between Britain and Spain at Versailles in February, 1783.

The night assault by British gunboats plays havoc with the Franco-Spanish fleet whose crewmen struggle vainly in shattered longboats and among the spars of wrecked batteries.

General Eliott, wearing a tricorn hat, supervised the bombardment of the Franco-Spanish fleet which attempted to batter Gibraltar into submission in 1782.

French and Spanish floating batteries, ungainly barn-like barges soon to be destroyed by British gunfire, bombard Gibraltar's defences. The letters and numerals on this French print were keyed to explanations of the action.

Hessian mercenaries and fit out 23 ships of the line to join the 17 then in service. France hesitated, and at the end of October backed down. She had never intended to intervene, her government said. The possibility of a Dutch Revolution dissolved and the security of Britain's Eastern interests was confirmed.

Two years later, Spain tried to enforce her traditional hegemony in the Pacific by seizing British ships and crews at Nootka Sound, on the western shore of what is now Canada. There was more at issue than this tiny outpost established by the East India Company. Spain claimed sovereignty over the entire Pacific, including places she had not settled, on the basis of the Papal Bull of 1493. Britain, she said, had already impinged on Spanish territory by founding a colony at Botany Bay in Australia. Because of Captain Cook's discoveries and a growing whaling industry, British interest in the area was increasing mightily, and was not to be deflected by a papal decree which was three centuries old.

Pitt took personal charge of negotiations, as he had in the Dutch crisis. By May, 1790, 40 ships of the line were being fitted out, and by the end of June, 25 of them were at sea. British garrisons in Gibraltar, India and the Caribbean were reinforced, and the Cabinet opened talks with potential South American revolutionaries about fomenting risings in Spanish colonies there. "The din of war," it was said, "ran through the country like wildfire." This was true power diplomacy, and it worked. Spain withdrew her demands and accepted most of Britain's. She returned the ships and crews, agreed that territory in western America north of her actual settlements was open to other countries, and conceded British rights to navigate and fish in the Pacific. From Nootka Sound eventually evolved the Canadian province of British Columbia.

Pitt tried to keep Britain out of the European war that blew up in the wake of France's Revolution in 1792, although not all Britons shared his distrust for involvement. As France moved on the Netherlands, a 34-year-old naval captain in Norfolk exclaimed happily, "Everything indicated War!" Horatio Nelson's expectations were fulfilled when France declared war on Great Britain and Holland in February, 1793.

If fight England must, then Pitt wanted her to fight at sea where she could strip France of her wealthy colonies. It was the same "blue water" policy his father had followed in the Seven Years' War, and was politically, economically and strategically sound for a nation whose army was, in reality, her Navy. But George III had his Hanoverian interests, his loathing for the French Revolution, and his place among kings to think of. He prevailed upon Pitt to promise 40,000 men as Britain's contribution to the Flanders campaign then being planned by a coalition of continental powers against Revolutionary France.

In numbers, Britain's army was contemptible when compared with the half million men bearing arms for France. Britain had only 15,000 soldiers at home and 30,000 scattered about the world. Parliament authorized recruiting 25,000 more, but without conscription this meant little. So, as in the American War, Britain hired Germans. Fourteen thousand of the King's Hanoverian army were transferred to the British payroll, and 8,000 Hessian mercenaries were taken on by contract.

The British Navy was still the world's first, although there were only 12 battleships in actual commission. In reserve there were 113 ships of the line waiting to be fitted out, against the French Navy's 76. Within weeks 54 of the British battleships had been commissioned and another 39 were ready for service when needed.

British troops under Sir Ralph Abercromby fanatical French resistance and sweep the last

Men to sail them were another matter. Naval personnel was down from 110,000 at the end of the American War to only 16,000. Press-gangs began their vigorous and vicious work, but it was months before the ships were adequately manned.

Once again, Britain dispersed her efforts. The early years of war saw her forces capturing and losing Toulon, advancing and retreating with French Royalists in the West, and tramping back and forth across the Lowlands – where the Duke of York's campaigning style not only bequeathed a nursery-rhyme to the language but taught young Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington, "how not to do it."

Nor were the West Indies ignored. In a century of struggle with France, 300,000 Englishmen had died in those disease-ridden islands, and this war would con-

At Alexandria a token force of British artillerymen remain

arm ashore at Aboukir Bay in 1801 to face
stiges of Napoleonic power from Egyptian soil.

tribute more than its share of corpses. Britain captured Martinique, St. Lucia and Guadeloupe by May, 1794, but French reinforcements and yellow fever eroded the conquests. In Santo Domingo (present-day Haiti) 7,400 of the 9,000 English soldiers died of the "black vomit" within the space of one year.

Reinforcements were needed everywhere. The King diagnosed the ailment: "The misfortune of our situation is that we have too many objects to attend to and our force consequently must be weak at each place." France gave Britain the cure. Britain's allies on the Continent were beaten into submission; pushed from Europe, Britain had to concentrate on enemy colonies overseas.

After the Netherlands fell to the French in 1795, the Prince of Orange fled to England and sent word to his colonies to accept British protection. The Cape of Good Hope resisted, because the British expedition arrived before the Prince's message, but the British were too strong and the Dutch colonists finally capitulated. Britain then acquired Trincomalee in Ceylon by buying off its garrison of Swiss mercenaries. In 1796 the Dutch colonies of Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo on the South American mainland were taken; a prize catch, their exports to Britain of cotton, sugar and coffee increased by ten times in three years.

One by one, Spain, Prussia and Austria dropped out of the war against France. The first to go was Spain. In October, 1796, motivated by an inconsolable yearning for Gibraltar, the Spaniards turned their large fleet against England. Fortunately, the Spanish Navy had not improved much since the last war. "The dons may make fine ships," said Nelson, "but they cannot make men."

The British Navy, however, had improved – and now could make men. When a large Spanish fleet sailed from the Mediterranean to join the French in early 1797, Admiral Sir John Jervis was waiting for them off Cape St. Vincent with 15 battleships, one commanded by the still unknown commodore, Nelson. Jervis's Flag Lieutenant counted the Spaniards as they stole forth from a mist. "There are 18 sail of line, Sir John."

"Very well, Sir."

"There are 20 sail of the line, Sir John."

"Very well, Sir."

"There are 27 sail, Sir John, near double our own!"

"If there are 50 sail of the line I will go through them," Jervis replied, and signalled his ships to make for a gap in the Spanish formation. Having divided the enemy, the British met the Spanish line on a parallel course, pounding each ship with broadsides as it passed. Nelson, whose ship the *Captain* was near the tail of the British line, saw that the main Spanish division was turning, trying to reunite with the others. Without hesitation – and contravening orders for line of battle – he placed the *Captain* directly in the path of the *Santissima Trinidad*, the largest fighting ship in the world. For ten minutes the *Captain* sustained the giant's terrible rain of fire alone, losing her foremast and wheel-post.

When other British ships arrived to take up the duel, Nelson put his crippled vessel alongside the 80-gun *San Nicolas* and led a boarding-party through her stern window. Finding the three-decker *San Josef* drifting against the other side of his prize, he boarded her under small-arms fire and there received both Spanish captains' swords simultaneously.

Two swords at once! The tale ran through the fleet, the Navy and England. The real importance of Cape St. Vincent may have been less that an enemy fleet was beaten than that Nelson was recognized as a champion for the Empire and would thereafter be employed as such. After the battle Jervis had four Spanish battleships in tow, but England had something she needed even more – a hero.

"In my mind's eye," said Nelson, "I ever saw a radiant orb suspended which beckoned me onwards to renown." His apologists have sometimes been loath to allow him his ambition – which is comparable to denying the average man his lungs – by saying he did not *really* mean glory. Of course he did. He lusted for glory and he hated the French with an intense and outspoken hatred. These two passions served him well on a frustrating mission in the Mediterranean in the summer of 1798.

Napoleon sailed from Toulon with 40,000 soldiers and 15 battleships in May, his destination unknown to the English. Without sufficient frigates, which then performed the functions of search planes and radios, Nelson set out to find him. At

guard in 1804 to prevent a possible French return.

Malta, the French had been and gone, but no one knew where. Nelson guessed it might be Egypt, but that meant sailing east, and any cautious commander would stay to the west in case the French tried to exit to the Atlantic. Nelson sailed east.

The French were not at Alexandria. He immediately sailed for the coast of Syria. The day he left Alexandria, Napoleon arrived, and a month later was entering Cairo in triumph while Nelson scoured the waters around Sicily. He had missed the big prize – catching Napoleon's army at sea – but the consolation prize would be sufficient. He tried Alexandria again.

Near there on August 1, lying in a two-mile line along the shore of Aboukir Bay, Nelson found the French fleet. It was nearly dark; there was no time to confer with his captains or sound a channel through the shoals. Without pausing, the British line of 13 ships sailed in and opened fire. All that night the British fought by the glow of burning French ships and all the next day fished French sailors from the water. Two French ships were sunk and nine captured; only two escaped. Nelson had given England her greatest naval victory since the days of the Spanish Armada.

Overnight, the Mediterranean became an English sea. Napoleon's army, although intact, was stranded in Egypt. Bonaparte could not march to India – which was his plan – without a fleet behind to supply him. He tried to move up through the Levant but a British Naval squadron stopped him at Acre. "If it had not been for you English, I'd have been Emperor of the East," he said later. "But wherever there is water to float a ship we are sure to find you in the way."

By the turn of the century, England had reaped a mighty harvest of her enemies' colonies. Her trade had never been greater. Exports had increased by half since the war began and imports had doubled. But her people were tired of war. Prices had risen faster than wages. A sixth of the population, it was said, was living on charity. The public was war-weary: it wanted peace.

Instead it had new enemies. In 1801 a league of Baltic powers – Russia, Sweden and Denmark – tried to break Britain's relentless blockade of France by challenging her practice of searching their ships. Pitt was determined France would not receive the stores she needed to rebuild her navy. He sent a fleet to assault the Danes at Copenhagen.

Nelson was second in command of the fleet, but led the 12 battleships that met the Danes in what he called the "most terrible" engagement of his career. It was in this battle, on April 2, 1801, that Nelson turned his blind eye to his superior officer's signal to break off the action. "Keep mine for closer battle flying," he ordered. "Nail mine to the mast."

After Nelson's crushing victory, the battered Danes and their intimidated allies yielded. At about the same time an army sent to destroy the French in Egypt was laying siege to Alexandria and marching successfully on Cairo. The war, however, was being lost in England. Pitt had resigned the Prime Ministership.

He had quit over the King's refusal to enfranchise Irish Catholics. When Nelson returned from Denmark, a new Prime Minister, Henry Addington, was eagerly courting peace. Napoleon, although he needed a respite to get more ships, successfully played for time, and the British yielded more and more of her war-time conquests at the conference table.

They agreed to return all the captured French sugar islands, including St. Lucia, highly valued for its strategic position, Tobago, which had been developed with British capital, and Martinique. The French also got back their posts and factories in India and West Africa and the Newfoundland fishing islands of Miquelon and St. Pierre. To the Dutch were returned the Cape of Good Hope, Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice on the South American mainland, plus their West Indian islands, including Curaçao. In the Mediterranean, Britain gave Minorca to Spain again and withdrew from Elba, the Ionian islands and Malta (the last under special conditions). Of all her conquests she retained only Trinidad in the West (formerly Spanish) and Ceylon in the East (formerly Dutch) – the one crucial to control of the Caribbean, the other to the Indian Ocean.

In return, Bonaparte promised to respect frontiers in Europe and withdraw his troops from Egypt, where – unknown in London – the last French garrison was already in the process of surrendering. That news reached England on October 2, 1801, on the very same day the armistice was announced.

The peace that ensued was really only an interval between acts of war. The curtain rose again 18 months later when the British refused to abandon Malta. In Europe, the conflict would last until 1815 and Waterloo, but the British Empire was not situated on that continent, nor could it be won or lost there. The war for Empire would be decided at sea, and much sooner.

One of the sailors on whom that decision would depend, Horatio (now Viscount) Nelson, took command of the Mediterranean fleet in May 1803, and began an odyssey that was to become an astonishing demonstration of human perseverance. The French Mediterranean fleet was in Toulon, so there Nelson placed himself, and there he stayed for 14 months.

He called that station his "home." It was not a comfortable one. The gales in the Gulf of Lyons exceeded their hostile reputation while Nelson was there. He could have gone to Malta for shelter. "But, if I am to watch the French, I must be at sea; and, if at sea, must have bad weather; and if the ships are not fit to stand bad weather, they are useless." The men were healthy; the introduction of a lemon-juice ration a few years before had eliminated scurvy as a cruise-limiting factor. He trained his crews. He wrote – to the Admiralty, his family, in his diary and to his beloved mistress Emma Hamilton. He worried mostly about where the French would go if they eluded him. And he waited.

Once, when the main body of Nelson's fleet was a few miles off, Admiral Louis Latouche-Trévill ventured out in pursuit of three ships left on close guard, and then rushed back to safety when the rest of the British appeared. Excited at having teased the lion, Latouche published a letter about it. "You will have seen Latouche's letter," Nelson wrote his brother; "How he chased me and how I ran. I keep it; and if I take him, by God he shall eat it." Latouche escaped that fate by dying, from climbing, it was said, so often up a hill to see if the English were still there that at last his heart gave out.

The Battle of the Nile

Napoleon's dream of an Egyptian Empire to rival the Pharaohs' crumbled to dust as Nelson smashed the French fleet in Aboukir Bay.

The line of British warships (Nelson's flagship *Vanguard* in the foreground) engages the French.

As dawn broke over the still-burning Fren
fleet British sailors saw that the bay bobb
with the bodies of hundreds of dead Frenchme
mangled and scorched from the holocau

Fire over Egypt

After scouring the Mediterranean for the French fleet, Nelson finally found it in Aboukir Bay as darkness fell on August 1, 1798. There was still enough light for him to realize that the French commander, Admiral Brueys, had made a fatal error: while the rear of his line of anchored vessels was guarded by an impassable shoal, the head was far enough away from Aboukir Point to let warships through the gap.

Nelson gambled. Though it was night, and the waters unknown, he sent five of his 13 ships through the narrow channel, thus outflanking the French from the landward side, while the remaining British ships advanced along the exposed seaward side. Neatly clamped between two lines of British guns, the French fleet was pulverized by fearful broadsides. Jagged spurts of flame stabbed through the soft Egyptian night as the hopelessly trapped French tried valiantly to fight back. It was useless, and soon captain after captain of the French ships began to surrender.

Nelson (right, with sword) watched the agonies of his writhing foe from the quarter-deck of the *Vanguard* and ordered boats to be lowered to rescue survivors.

Blazing ships bathed the battle in an unearthly glow, silhouetting the fleets against the blackness of the night.

The horror on the ships was repeated in the water, where hundreds of burned and wounded seamen clung to spars and planks as they awaited rescue by the British.

At the height of the battle, the French flagship *L'Orient*, with Admiral Brueys aboard, blew up with a roar that could be heard 15 miles away in Alexandria. The combatants were so appalled by the colossal explosion and the accompanying sheet of flame that for a full three minutes a deathly silence fell over the fleet. Chunks of debris rained down on the ships and men stood open-mouthed by their guns. With the destruction of *L'Orient* the battle was as good as over. In three and a half hours Nelson destroyed or captured 13 ships out of a fleet of 17, with no loss to himself. "Victory is not a name strong enough for such a scene," said Nelson the next morning. He was right, for no British naval triumph had ever been so complete.

III. A Burgeoning New Empire

Nelson was off Sardinia when his frigates brought welcome news on January 19, 1805: the French were out! He gave chase, came within sight of them and prepared for battle. But the weather broke suddenly and he lost them in the storm. He beat round Sicily for ten days and then ran down to Egypt, thinking that might have been their destination as in 1798. It was not. He learned they had gone back to Toulon.

He made for Spain, hoping his absence would embolden them to sail. In March, they came out again and headed west, but by the time Nelson learned of it he could not get a fair wind to follow them, nor even a side wind. "Dead foul! – Dead foul!" They passed Gibraltar on March 8; he was not there until April 30.

He discovered they had picked up a Spanish fleet at Cadiz and had made for the West Indies, now 20 battleships and eight frigates. With ten battleships and three frigates, he pursued, telling his captains, "Take you a Frenchman apiece and leave me the Spaniards." In the West Indies, he followed false leads for five days, and, hearing they had gone back to Europe, immediately recrossed the Atlantic as unhesitatingly as if he had simply tacked on one side of the Serpentine and was now beating back to the other.

"July 18th," he wrote. "Cape Spartel in sight but no French fleet, nor any information about them. How sorrowful this makes me!"

"July 20th (back at Gibraltar): I went on shore for the first time since June 16th, 1803." That had been more than two years before.

Following slim clues and hunches Nelson went north. He looked in Cadiz. He prowled the Bay of Biscay. As a last hope he set sail for the north-west coast of Ireland, and on August 12 found they had not been there. On August 15, he joined the Channel fleet off Ushant and was ordered to Portsmouth, where he anchored on August 18, 1805. Since May, 1803, he had been out of his ship, the *Victory*, only three times, and never for more than an hour.

He was now the most famous man in England. All heads turned to follow the little Admiral on the streets of London, but it was not compensation enough; he had not caught the French. He went home to Emma at Merton. There early on the morning of September 3, Captain Henry Blackwood, driving hard for London, stopped to give him the news: the combined fleets were at Cadiz. Within hours, Nelson was at the Admiralty. He set sail again and finally caught up with his long-sought quarry off Cape Trafalgar.

Even before Nelson destroyed the French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar, Britain had repossessed many of the enemy's rich colonies yielded at the Peace of Amiens: Tobago, St. Lucia, Demerara, Essequibo, Berbice and Surinam in the West Indies; St. Pierre and Miquelon off Newfoundland; and Pondicherry and some other French East Indian posts. After the Battle of Trafalgar, the seas belonged to Britain and she could select and acquire colonial objectives almost at will, although some of them would be returned at a later date.

In 1806 she captured the Cape of Good Hope. In 1807: Curaçao from the Dutch; some West Indian islands, plus Heligoland, in the North Sea, from the Danes. In 1808: Martinique, Cayenne (French Guiana) and Senegal, a French outpost in Africa. That same year the British occupied several of the Ionian islands; Lissa, in the Adriatic; and Anholt, a Danish island in the Kattegat – all of which were of great value as "back-door" trading-stations to circumvent Napoleon's embargo on British products entering the Continent. In 1810, Britain seized Guadeloupe and St. Martin in the West Indies and France's Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius, Ile de Bourbon and the Seychelles. That year she also began gathering in the Dutch East Indies, collecting Amboyna and Banda, finally taking possession of fabulous Java in 1811.

These new possessions were of great help in winning the war. Theoretically completely excluded from the European trade by Napoleon's embargo, England depended on the tropical colonies for wealth. And the desire of Europeans for things that only Britain now could sell them from American and Eastern colonies helped to undermine France's domination of the Continent. As one historian put it, in a dryly commercial phrase, "In the last resort Napoleon was beaten by cotton and dyes, by sugar and coffee."

Since Britain's chief aim was to re-establish viable royalist governments in Europe, most of these colonies were returned to their former owners at the Peace of 1815. But Britain retained some important ones. The Cape and Ceylon were kept for their obvious strategic value to the Eastern trade-routes. Mauritius and the Seychelles were also retained, not because the British needed them as bases but because during the war the French had used them so effectively as ports for their cruisers that were harrying British merchantmen.

Having seen Napoleon use Malta and the Ionian islands as stepping-stones in his effort to conquer India, Britain kept the former and established a protectorate over the latter. Heligoland, an island off Schleswig-Holstein, was kept for its strategic position in the North Sea.

In the West Britain refused to give up Trinidad and St. Lucia, because both were well placed for keeping an eye on French and Spanish movements and Trinidad also appeared to be a good centre for trade with South America. Britain also declined to return Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice to the Netherlands because British planters had thoroughly Anglicized them, having invested £15,000,000 in coffee, cotton, and sugar estates there. Instead, she gave £5,000,000 to the Dutch in compensation for these colonies, which later became British Guiana, and for the Cape. Tobago was retained on similar grounds.

There had been other extensions of Empire apart from those provided by the war. Loyalist refugees from the United States had founded Upper Canada (Ontario), Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. When America was lost as a dumping-ground for convicts a new one had been established in New South Wales, thus giving birth to Australia. Sierra Leone, Britain's first African settlement, was established as a home for former negro slaves freed from service in England. The "new" or Second Empire finally was increased by the selection of St. Helena as a prison for Napoleon; the desolate islands of Tristan de Cunha and Ascension were annexed to keep an eye on him. When the war began in 1792, Britain had possessed 26 colonies. In 1816, she ruled 43. Her Empire had almost doubled

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